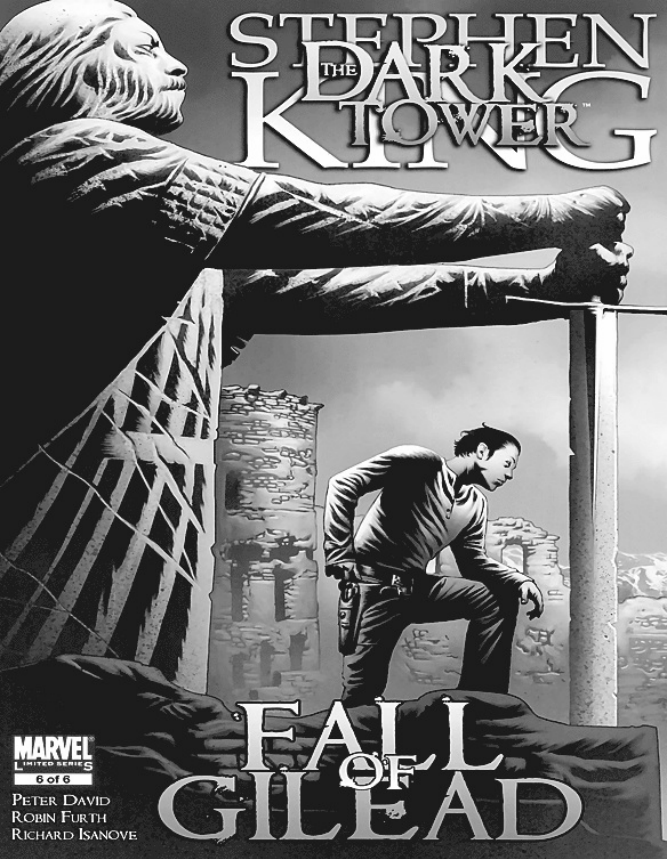


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STEPHEN THE DARK KING

FALL OF GILEAD

MARVEL
LIMITED SERIES
6 of 6

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IN A WORLD THAT HAS MOVED ON...

As Gilead readied itself for the festive celebration of its new-titled gunslingers, Roland's mother prepared to repent for her adulterous sins with the sorcerer Marten. Seemingly out of nowhere, Marten appeared and lured Gabrielle into becoming the prime element in the planned assassination of her husband Steven with the help of Steven's great enemy, John Farson, and Farson's nephew and spy, Kingson. Distrusting his returned mother, Roland left the festivities to find the destructive sphere called Maerlyn's Grapefruit hidden away in her chambers. The sphere drew him into a hallucination that provoked him into fatally shooting Gabrielle...

Meanwhile, Steven has discovered his wife's treachery and heads to his chambers where he sees that Maerlyn's Grapefruit is gone from his safe. And the only person who was close enough to Steven to take the key was Gabrielle.

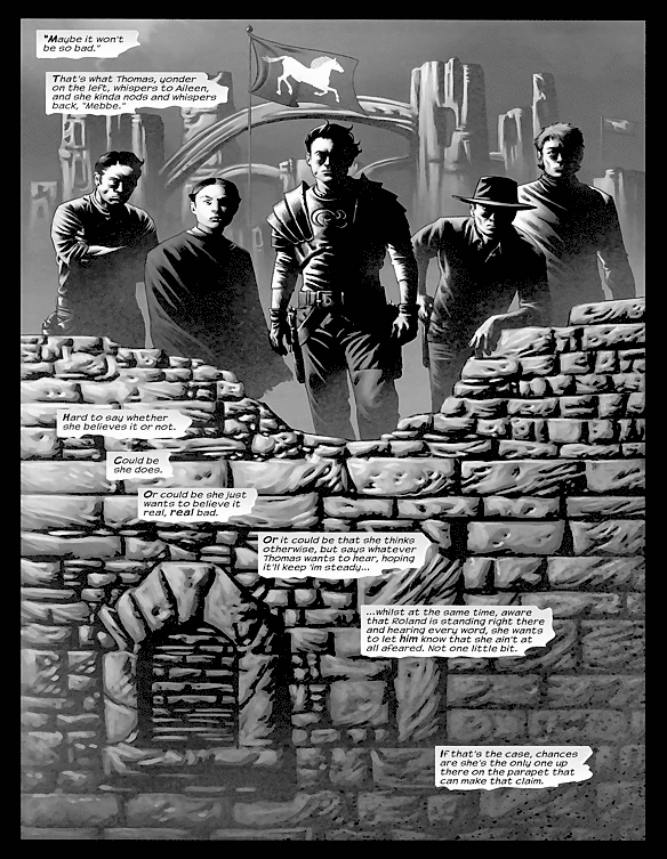
Steven makes the decision to track the Good Man, John Farson, to his camp and then capture him, kill the evil sorcerer Marten and retrieve Maerlyn's Grapefruit.

Only by bringing the machinations of Farson into the light can the taint of premeditated murder be removed from his son Roland.

But one of Deschain's men, Justus, is a traitor and alerts Farson's men to Steven's presence. Swiftly, Steven and his twenty gunslingers are surrounded, and a fierce gun battle ensues.

The few survivors return to the city where Steven prepares to activate doomsday defenses installed by his ancestor, Arthur Eld.

But Steven is assassinated by an agent of the Good Man and so the fate of Gilead now rests in the hands of his young son Roland, who must prepare the city to face the forces of John Farson.



*"Maybe it won't
be so bad."*

*That's what Thomas, yonder
on the left, whispers to Aileen,
and she kinda nods and whispers
back, "Mebbe."*

*Hard to say whether
she believes it or not.*

*Could be
she does.*

*Or could be she just
wants to believe it
real, real bad.*

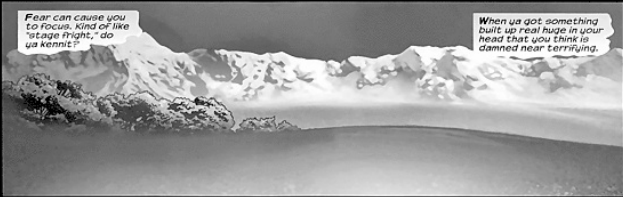
*Or it could be that she thinks
otherwise, but says whatever
Thomas wants to hear, hoping
it'll keep 'im steady...*

*...whilst at the same time, aware
that Roland is standing right there
and hearing every word, she wants
to let him know that she ain't at
all afeared. Not one little bit.*

*If that's the case, chances
are she's the only one up
there on the parapet that
can make that claim.*

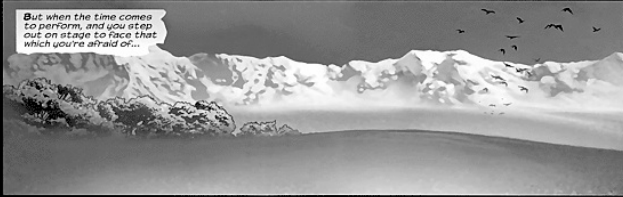


Yet fear can be useful, too. Roland knows that.



Fear can cause you to focus. Kind of like "stage fright," do ya kennit?

When ya got something built up real huge in your head that you think is damned near terrifying.



But when the time comes to perform, and you step out on stage to face that which you're afraid of...



You find yourself saying, "Well, hey now! Why was I so a'scared? This ain't so bad at all!" And it's all easy from there.

Except sometimes things aren't as bad as you feared...

...because they turn
out to be worse.

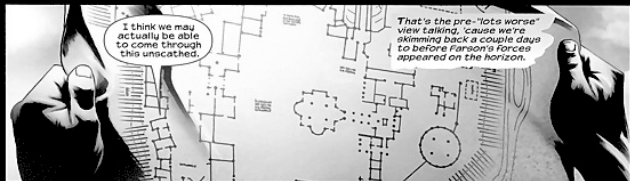


Lots worse.

*Ultimate
nightmare
worse.*

*Farson's assault
on Gilead is one
of those times.*









Hopefully it won't come to that. But the worry is...

...it likely will.

But Roland knows that's the last thing anyone needs to hear, "specially from him."

Eighty-one, eighty-two, eighty-three...



Eighty-four paces exactly, Roland.

Let's just hope Arthur Eld didn't have a dwarf counting this off or we're going to be *sorely* disappointed when the fight starts.

I'm fairly confident he didn't, Jamie. Place the marker.



Aileen! Can you see the red cloth from there? So you can tell where the Pit starts?



Seems she can. Girl's got quite a pair of eyes in that pretty head.

Good pair of ears, too.

Not to mention an *impressive* set of--

Jamie...!

--credentials... I was going to say.

Sure you were.





What did
you just say
to me--?

Alain,
just...not
now, all right?
Please?

Do we have
a problem
here?

Well, that
depends. Are you
sanguine about having our
lives depending upon antiquated,
decrepit machinery that hasn't
been maintained since well
before our great-grandfathers
sucked at their mothers'
breasts?

I am...no.
No, I'm not
sanguine about
that at all.

Then yes, we
have a problem.
But as long as we
have two weeks
to get things in
order, we'll be
fine.

Three days later...

"Cuthbert! Cuthbert,
she's *signaling*!"



"The mutants
have reached the
first marker!"



Cuthbert!
I said they've
reached *the*
marker!



By all means,
you half-wit, keep
screaming at me!
Maybe your *VOICE*
will jar loose
the rust!





I'm *doing*
my damned job!
So *you* do
y--



Oh, pus in
a bucket.

Incoming!



The mortar shell strikes
way too close, taking off
the top of the tower and
sending rubble spilling
down and jolting the
whole structure...

...and, by a stroke
of luck--



Alain!
That shook
the lever
loose!

Good thinking,
getting them
to shoot at
you!

Uhm...
thanks... I
guess.



Like the yawning gateways
to hell they were intended
to emulate...

...the Pits open wide. Just
like that, hundreds upon
hundreds of mutants and
soldiers tumble down,
down...

...to be impaled upon
stakes that have been
waiting for this opportunity
for centuries. A development
to which John Farnon reacts
with his customary
compassion...



Well. *That* was interesting.

They're...they're **gone!** The entire front lines are gone!

Thank you, Marten. Were my eyes failing me, that observation would have been of some use.



Lord Farson! They had some manner of booby traps rigged! Vast pits that--

And thank *you*, General Grissom. It appears my closest advisors have chosen to spend the battle informing me of the patently obvious.

I shall respond in kind:



They are a bunch of damned mutants. I care not if they fall into pits or are struck down by fire from on high. They are merely cannon fodder.

Their purpose is precisely to fall prey to whatever little traps may have been prepared, so that more important individuals--such as us--can proceed unmolested.

"Once a trap is sprung,
it cannot be reused."

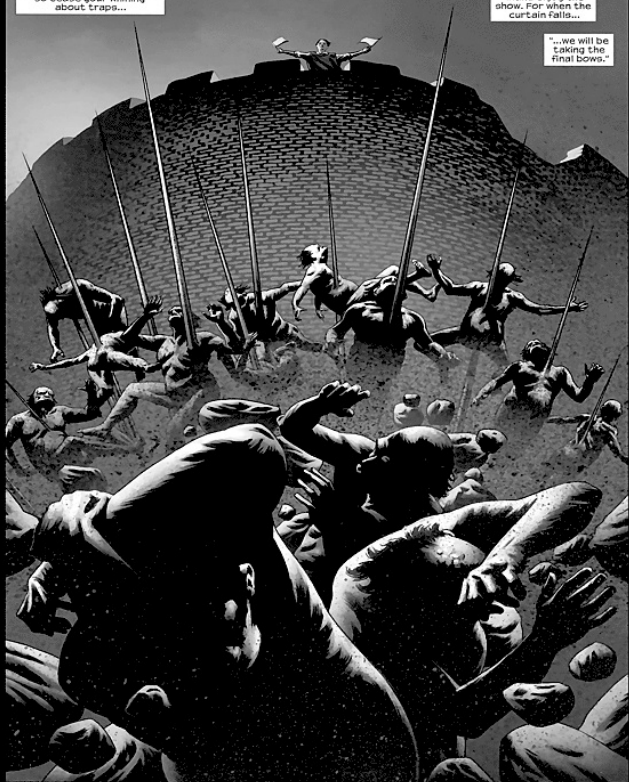
"Gee? Even now the
piles of dead mutants
simply serve as a
bridge for the next
wave to cross upon."



"Time, and body counts,
are on our side, gentlemen.
So cease your whining
about traps..."

"...and enjoy the
show. For when the
curtain falls..."

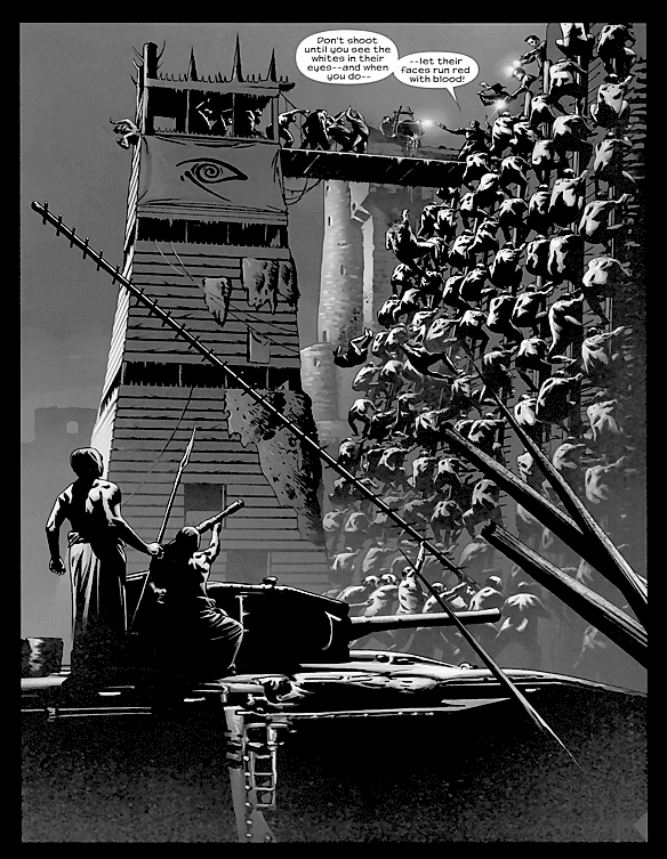
"...we will be
taking the
final bows."





They're
going to try
and breach
the walls!

Make *every*
shot count! For
the lives of the
mothers that bore
you and the faces
of the fathers
who smiled
upon you--



Don't shoot
until you see the
whites in their
eyes--and when
you do--

--let their
faces run red
with blood!

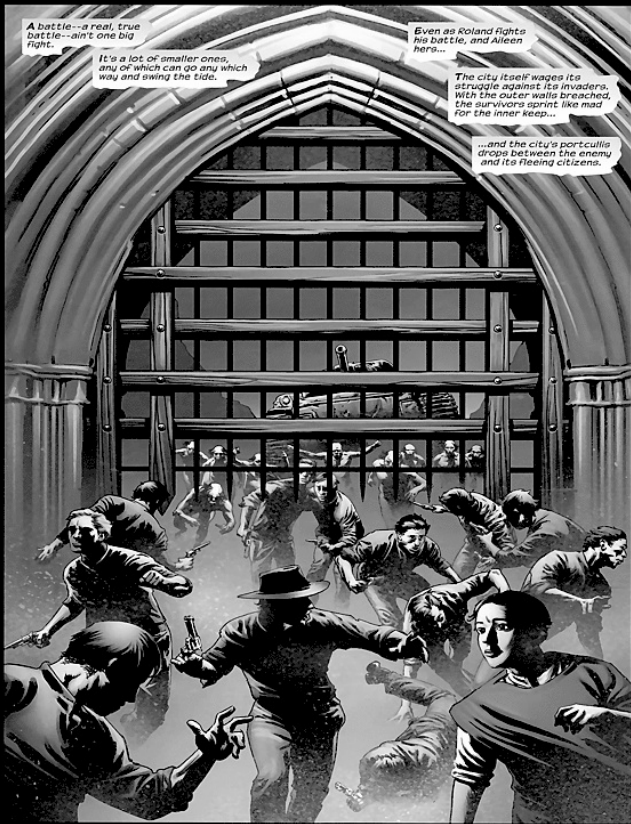
*A battle--a real, true
battle--ain't one big
fight.*

*It's a lot of smaller ones,
any of which can go any which
way and swing the tide.*

*Even as Roland fights
his battle, and Aileen
here...*

*The city itself wages its
struggle against its invaders.
With the outer walls breached,
the survivors sprint like mad
for the inner keep...*

*...and the city's portcullis
drops between the enemy
and its fleeing citizens.*



Three days earlier, of course, no mutants were assailing Gilead. Three days earlier...

...there was still hope.

The blades should come out here, then.



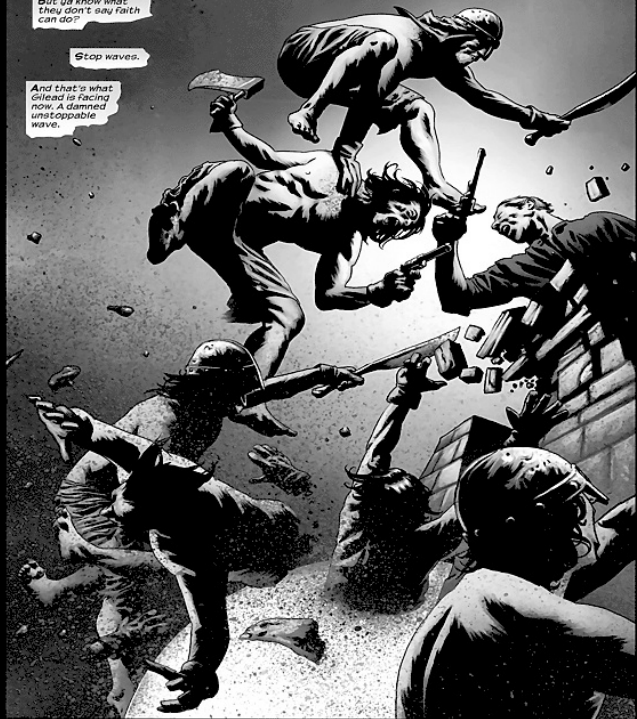
Belief is a
good thing.

Hell, they say
Faith can move
mountains.

But ya know what
they don't say Faith
can do?

Stop waves.

And that's what
Gilead is facing
now. A damned
unstoppable
wave.



Farson! I
know where
you're hiding,
you can hear
me!

Spinner of
lies and master
of webs of
deceit...



We have a few master
spinners and webmakers
of our own!



Introduce
the flies to
our spiders,
gentlemen!





The young dinh seems to have a tendency to shoot off his mouth.

Grissom!
Shoot off his mouth for him!
And while you're at it--

Shoot him off the walls, along with the rest of his damned gunslingers, and take the walls with them!



The bazookas spit out death, a single shell carrying more destruction than a hundred bullets from the gunslingers could inflict.

Down come the inner walls, bringing the last fleeting hopes of the city's defenders with them.



The air is thick with smoke and debris and the smell of death is everywhere.



Meanwhile the damnable traitors who were responsible for, among other deaths, that of Alain's father Chris...

...make their way through the streets of Gilead, descending down, down...

...down to the sanctuary where the women and children are huddled.



Is...is it over?



For you?
Yes.
Yes, it is.





PFFFFFFT



It's out
of fuel?! You
let it run
out of--

Shut
up! Ah...

Hail...
Roland?
Renowned
for his mercy
and--



BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM



Idiots.

If I thought
for a moment
that such as *these*
had anything to do
with my father's death,
I'd likely shoot
myself from
chance.



Christ
and the Man-
Jesus...

That's...
why they were
out of fuel. They
used up all their
flames on...



As they walk through a
sanctuary that proved
to be anything but, he
says nothing more.



Why should he?
What else is there
to say?

*Especially when
the flag of John
Farson, flying
above the
remains of
Gilead...*

...says it all.



THE END

PLANNING THE FALL OF GILEAD

Of all the Dark Tower comic books that I've plotted so far, Issues 5 and 6 of *Fall of Gilead* were the most difficult to complete. The reason? In these two issues I had to describe the collapse of Roland's beloved home city—one of the most significant and formative experiences of Roland's youth—but in the Dark Tower novels, details about this battle are few. Although the Fall of Gilead radically altered the course of Roland's life and in many ways initiated his wanderings across Mid-World, Roland tells us next to nothing about the collapse of his homeland. What battle tactics did Farson use when he besieged the city? How did Roland and his friends defend the townsfolk once their elders were dead? And most importantly of all, how did

our *tet* escape with their lives when their attackers so vastly outnumbered them? Although I returned to the novels over and over, I found little there to help me reconstruct that catastrophic series of events.

As I hope my fellow Dark Tower junkies will attest, most of the significant occurrences that we've covered so far in our comics were pre-ordained. The plot of *The Gunslinger Born* was adapted from *Wizard and Glass*, which is Book IV of the Dark Tower series. Although I needed to draw upon scenes from *The Gunslinger* (Book I) in order to fill in some background information, the tale of Roland's trip to Hambry and of his doomed love affair with beautiful Susan Delgado had already been told in great detail by the Master himself.

The story recounted in *The Long Road Home* was also based on established events. After our *tet*'s shoot-out with Farson's followers and the death of the Big Coffin Hunter Eldred Jonas, our friends galloped back to Gilead pursued by Clay Reynolds and the surviving Hambry traitors. But unlike the earlier adventures where Roland remained firmly in control, during that long





trip across the Xay River and through Mid-World's forests, Alain and Cuthbert were forced to show their devotion and bravery. While Alain and Cuthbert carried Roland's inert body homeward, Roland's consciousness was trapped within the evil seeing sphere known as Maerlyn's Grapefruit. (And as Stephen King assured me during an email conversation, much could have happened during Roland's sojourn that he later forgot to confide to his *tet*-mates!)

The third installment of our tale began with our *tet*'s triumphant return to Gilead, but soon enough the meaning of the title *Treachery* became obvious. While Roland and his friends were battling the Good Man's followers in Hambry, Roland's mother took refuge in a women's retreat in Debaria. And though she'd initially made that journey to pay penance for betraying her husband and her city, she soon returned to the

arms of her treacherous lover, Marten Broadcloak (aka Walter O'Dim). From there, her fate was sealed.

To please Marten, Gabrielle agreed to murder her husband with a poisoned knife smuggled to her by Farson's nephew, who entered Gilead dressed as a wandering musician. But thanks to a *glam* thrown by Maerlyn's Grapefruit, Gabrielle didn't succeed in her plan but was instead killed by her son Roland. (And for those of you who are interested, the subplot in which Farson's nephew was murdered by Cort for cheating at riddles arose from an interesting intersection of events recounted in the novels. I knew that Farson's nephew had entered Gilead dressed as a minstrel, but I also knew that Cort—who took his riddling matches very seriously—once murdered a wandering minstrel for cheating. The synchronicity was too good to pass up . . .)

Given what had happened so far, beginning *The Fall of Gilead* wasn't so scary. Since *Treachery* had ended with the death of Gabrielle Deschain, I knew that *The Fall of Gilead* had to begin with Roland's arrest. Since in the books we're never told that Farson's nephew died in the city, I thought I could bring him back to life again by adapting one of my favorite scenes from *The Gunslinger*, where Walter O'Dim resurrects a dead weedeater in the town of Tull. Although this may have seemed like an odd choice to some readers out there, I hoped that by including this scene I could show new Dark Tower fans something that longtime Constant Readers already knew—namely that Walter had power over death as well as life.

Next on my agenda was reintroducing Sheemie, since in Book VII of our saga Roland tells us that Sheemie found his way to Gilead before the city's fall. After that, I had to turn to murder and mayhem. First on the chopping block was my old friend Cort, who had to be poisoned. After that, I had to pick off all of the elder gunslingers, including Steven Deschain. Steven's death scene was particularly tricky, since Roland makes it very clear in the books that the identity of his father's murderer was never discovered. (And by the way, the brilliant idea of having Steven's murderer fall into Gilead's moat was the brainchild of Richard Isanove.) So, up until the end of Issue 4, I felt fairly confi-

dent that I was following the forward momentum of *ka's* wheel, and weaving a plot that retained the vision of the original books. However the final battle was already beginning to loom and I was getting nervous.

Luckily for me, sometimes *ka* is kind. Although I knew very little about the fall of Gilead, I *did* have copious notes which I'd copied down during Marvel's initial meeting with Stephen King. And though during that meeting Stephen didn't describe the battle of Gilead specifically, he *was* very clear about how well equipped Farson's men should be at this point in the game. And I must tell you, the odds against our *tet's* survival were pretty appalling. One glance at my notes told me that Roland and his friends—a few apprentices and newly fledged gunslingers armed only with handguns and backed up by inexperienced merchants and farmers—didn't stand a chance against the advanced weaponry that Farson's hoards wielded. But I also knew that our young *dinh* was both valiant and resourceful. From many years of studying Roland's battle strategies, I knew our hero would come up with *something*. The problem was, what would it be?

Sleepless night followed sleepless night. What was I going to do? I wanted to weave a plot that illustrated Roland's resourcefulness, but which would also tie together the many loose story strands that hung in tatters. I



couldn't let Peter and Richard down, but I was stumped. Again and again I returned to the fact that—although he was outnumbered—Roland was on home ground and that *had* to give him some advantage over his enemies, however slight. But what could that advantage be? Every gunslinger had to remember the faces of his fathers, but didn't those fathers also have a responsibility to their sons? Roland's father Steven was dead, but couldn't he attempt something—some final valiant act—that would help his beloved heir? And what about Arthur Eld, that brilliant strategist? During his lifetime he had fought to secure All-World against harriers and mutants. Couldn't Mid-World's Once and Future King have anticipated an attack much like the one that was about to take place?

From these midnight musings, the idea for Gilead's secret defenses was born. How else could Roland and his friends inflict some damage on the enemy and yet still escape with their lives? And given the gunslingers' code of honor, our young friends *had* to try to rescue their townsfolk, even if that rescue effort was doomed to fail. (And as for that failure, I couldn't let Roland or his friends go valiantly down with the ship, since I knew that their most important stand against the enemy was yet to come. . .)

Believe it or not, the first draft of Gilead's defenses was drawn up on a napkin in an airport café. I'd already handed in the outlines for *Fall of Gilead* issues 1-4 and the entire volume of *The Battle of Jericho Hill*, but the story of Gilead's final stand had hitherto eluded me. Time was short, Richard and Peter were desperate to get started, yet I was still chewing my nails.

Over a really bad cup of coffee, I started to confide my worries to my husband. How could so few poorly armed boys defend themselves against so many well-equipped madmen? Was it possible that the city itself could



have some traps in it? And if so, what could those traps be? Wracking my brain, I recalled the battle scenes of every Hollywood epic I had ever watched. I thought of great Westerns, like John Wayne's version of *The Alamo*. I went back over *The Lord of the Rings*, and the many fantasy and sci-fi novels I'd read over the years. And I also thought about ancient history. How did people defend themselves when they were besieged in their castles for months or even years at a time?

Luckily for me, my husband is a big fantasy and science fiction fan too, and he spent his early years



devouring books about ancient and medieval history. Between the two of us we made quite an inky mess of that napkin. We figured out what defenses Arthur Eld might have built into his city, and how they might have worked. We asked ourselves what challenges our young friends would face when they tried to use such rusty machinery and what might go wrong. How could they maximize the traditional defenses such as boiling pitch, and how could they pretend that their numbers were much greater than they actually were? And most of all, how much time would Arthur Eld's traps buy our friends, and how much damage would they let us inflict upon Farson's hoards?

Whether or not I succeeded in my attempts to defend Gilead is up to you, but please be gentle in your assessment. I did my best to remember the faces of my fathers and mothers, and most of all, I tried to stand and be true to our favorite *kas-ka Gan*¹, Stephen King.

Believe me, it's not easy trying to second-guess Roland's cruel ka. But my job is to set our hero on the long road to Jericho Hill, and that I have done. Unfortunately for Roland, the

road ahead of him is arduous, and the fate that awaits him is even more painful.

May your days be long upon the earth. I've done my best to give our *ka-tet* a few more days as well.

All the Best—

Robin Furth 

WRITTEN BY:
ROBIN FURTH
ILLUSTRATED BY:
DENNIS CALERO

¹Prophet of Gan, or singer of Gan.

Veteran Marvel artist Tom Raney (*Annihilation: Conquest*; *Black Widow: Deadly Origin*) does justice to the stoic Roland in this moody portrait of Mid-World's gunslinger. The final version was colored by Tom's wife and longtime coloring partner, Gina Going-Raney.

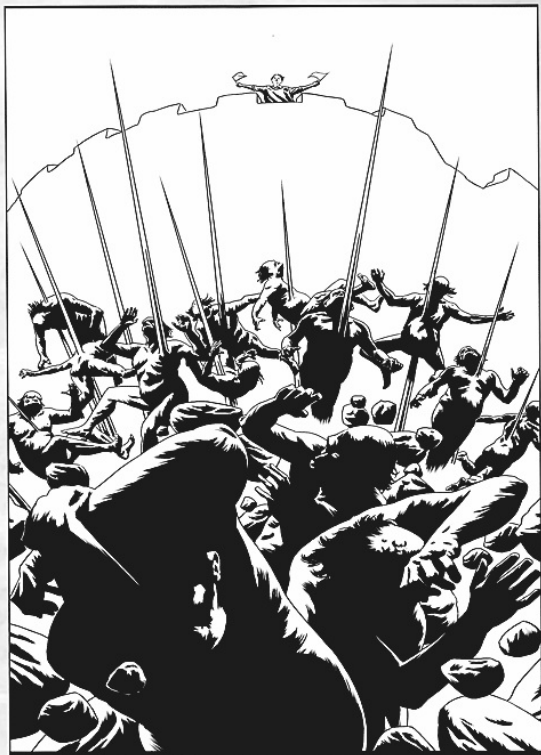


RICHARD ISANOVE'S BLACK AND WHITE ARTWORK. THE FINISHED VERSION OF THESE PAGES APPEARED EARLIER IN THE ISSUE.









AN EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW OF DARK TOWER: THE BATTLE OF JERICHO HILL.
PENCIL ART BY JAE LEE.



NEXT: The Battle of Jericho Hill begins!





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain, the young man whose destiny it is to seek and save the Dark Tower, is haunted by horrifying visions from the evil seeing sphere, Maerlyn's Grapefruit. The Crimson King, enemy of all that lives, has long plotted the utter destruction of the Tower, and the undoing of reality itself. Now, with Roland unable to act, his monstrous foe has put his plan into motion...

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life in *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger Born*, *The Dark Tower: The Long Road Home*, and *The Dark Tower: Treachery* comes the next chapter of this dark saga of friendship, betrayal and a cosmic quest as conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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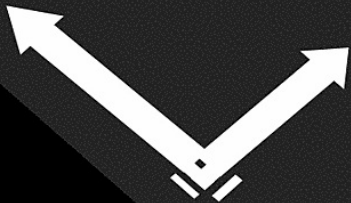
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